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*The New Hampshire Union Leader Sunday News, September 9, 2012*

FRANCONIA — In a ceremony hosted by military veterans Saturday, perhaps the only thing bigger than the American flag unfurled on the slopes of Cannon Mountain was the pride felt by those who put it there.

Members of the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association unfurled a 45-by-90-foot World War II commemorative flag on the slope of Cannon Mountain as part of a ceremony, in memory of those who died in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The ceremony also included remarks from Congressman Charlie Bass and guest speaker John Molloy, who was at ground zero in New York City during the terrorist attacks.

The event started near the Old Man of the Mountain viewing area, but heavy winds through Franconia Notch knocked over equipment, and support poles were snapped in two during efforts to post the CVMA banner.

Organizers moved more than 200 people into the Cannon Mountain tramway building for a shortened ceremony.

After a brief invocation, Bass spoke to the crowd. "I thank you not only for your service to America, but for what you do today to make sure we remember."

John Molloy, a member of the Gulf and Iraq Veterans Coalition, spoke about his Sept. 11 experience, noting it was his first time doing so in public.

His office was on the 96th floor of the second building to be struck in the attack on the Twin Towers, and he was entering his building when the first plane struck.

"When I looked up at the towers, even my combat experience in Vietnam did not prepare me for what I saw," he said, holding back tears.

The following day, 95 fellow employees of his company were missing. Ten of the missing were veterans, and he listed them by name Saturday.

"I thank the veterans of Iran and Afghanistan who avenged the blood of those who died," he said.

Members of the White Mountains Regional High School Army JROTC served as color guard during the ceremony. As Molloy spoke, one of the color guard youths became ill, and CVMA member Steve Berniche of Winchester quietly stepped forward to take her place.

When organizers asked whether members were willing to try to unfurl the flag even in the high

winds, the response was: "Yeah, let's do it!" and "Hoo-rah!"

On his way to help, Gerry Cournoyer of Rhode Island stopped to pay his respects at a memorial for Army Sgt. David S. Stelmat on Cannon Mountain.

"It's touching, it's heart-wrenching," he said of the event. "When you hear the stories of other people, plus what you've been through yourself, it brings all the memories back."

The Cannon Mountain trams slowed so tourists could watch the flag being stretched out. As the flag reached its full length, one woman described the sight as "totally awesome," and after wiping away a tear she said, "Stick that in your Taliban hat."

Veterans saluted as the "Star-Spangled Banner" was sung over the mountain.

CVMA public relations director Mike Farinola said the group was holding a weekend-long regional meeting and wanted to include a Sept. 11 observance. He said the group works to provide physical therapy equipment for veterans, ROTC scholarships, and home heating oil for vets in need.

"We're one of those quiet groups; we try to do a lot of things behind the scenes," he said. "But today we're making noise."